

+ VII.—On the Species of the Genus *Plotus* and their
Distribution. By H. B. TRISTRAM, D.D., F.R.S.

(Plate III.)

THERE are few groups in ornithology more distinct than the subfamily Plotinæ—so sharply marked that not an aberrant Cormorant on the one side, or Tropic-bird on the other, has ever been suspected of balancing itself on the boundary-fence. Yet even this self-contained group has not escaped the fate of all others, of being subdivided into baseless species. The genus *Plotus* is usually held to contain four species:—

(1) *P. anhinga*, L., extending through the temperate and tropical regions of the whole New World.

(2) *P. levaillanti*, Licht., hitherto supposed to be confined to Southern, Western, and Central Africa.

(3) *P. melanogaster*, Gm., inhabiting the whole Indian region and Madagascar.

(4) *P. novæ-hollandiæ*, Gould, from Australia.

It is difficult, from the specimens in the British Museum, to distinguish this last bird from *P. melanogaster*. Gould, in his description, gives as the diagnosis of the species (P. Z. S. 1847, p. 34)—“Very closely allied to the *Plotus* inhabiting Java, but distinguished from it by the shortness of the scapularies and by its larger size.” On examining the series in the Museum, I do not find any such constant differences. The largest Chinese specimen equals the smallest Australian in both respects. I am inclined to agree with Schlegel (Mus. des Pays-Bas) in specifically uniting the Australian with the Indian bird.

During my journey through Northern Syria in 1881, it was my good fortune to discover a colony of *Plotus* breeding in the Bahr el Abiad, or Lake of Antioch. I brought this fact before the notice of the Zoological Society, and exhibited a male specimen in full breeding-plumage and the eggs obtained by me (P. Z. S. 1881, p. 826), identifying the bird with the African *P. levaillanti*, and not with the Indian species. I gave a further description of this colony in ‘The Ibis’ (1882, p. 418).

M. Oustalet, in reviewing the collections made in the same region by M. Chantre (Ann. Sc. Nat. July 1882, art. 7), describes the Antioch *Plotus* as a new species, under the name of *P. chantrei*, and states that he differs from my conclusions, asserting also that the Antioch bird has its affinities rather with the Indian than with the African species. I was not a little surprised at this expression of opinion, and also at the omission by M. Oustalet of the one permanent character which in all stages of plumage distinguishes the African from the Indian bird, viz. the grey or rusty-brown band at the termination of the primary wing-coverts, which forms a conspicuous terminal bar on the wing. This is admirably shown by Temminck (Pl. Col. 380); but Schlegel (Mus. des Pays-Bas) is the only writer who, so far as I can ascertain, has drawn attention to this as the one true specific distinction. In all the Indian and Australian birds there is not the slightest trace of this russet band, the whole wing being a rich glossy black. The three points given in his diagnosis by M. Oustalet to distinguish this new species are:—1st. The silky-white markings of the feathers on the side of the neck, and the white periophthalmic line reaching to the forehead. But both these characters are found in *P. levaillanti* in breeding-plumage, and are well shown in Temminck's plate. 2nd. The front of the neck white, hardly tinted with yellow. This, again, is the character of the African bird in nuptial dress. 3rd. The silvery markings on the wings and back being thicker and broader. This also varies with age, sex, and season in both species. I have examined over sixty specimens in the British Museum, and compared them with my Antioch skin, and have come to the decided conclusion that the Antioch bird is simply *P. levaillanti* in full nuptial dress. In this I am confirmed by Mr. Sharpe, who kindly examined the series with me. It is very difficult to find two specimens in exactly identical plumage, and there is not one in the large Museum series in such absolutely perfect nuptial dress as my bird.

I should have added that, besides the russet or brown wing-bar, the African and Syrian species has also the inner



J. G. Keulemans lith.

Hartnoll imp.

PLOTUS LEVAILLANTI.

web of the broad scapular feather of the same russet or rich brown colour in all stages of plumage, whereas in the Indian species this mark is replaced by a white stripe.

I have only, therefore, to reaffirm the identity of the Syrian with the African species, feeling satisfied that M. Oustalet, when he wrote his article, had not seen a fully adult male of *P. levaillanti* in breeding-dress.

The figure of this bird (Plate III.) is taken from my Syrian specimen, an adult in full breeding-plumage.

VIII.—On the Wren of St. Kilda.

By H. E. DRESSER, F.Z.S.

WHEN Mr. Seebohm last year (Zoologist, 1884, p. 333) described the St. Kilda Wren as distinct from *Troglodytes parvulus*, naming it *Troglodytes hirtensis*, he showed me the specimen from which his description was taken, and I then said that it differed so little from our English bird that I would prefer to reserve my opinion as to the validity of the species until I could examine a larger series. Since then Mr. Seebohm has received five more examples from St. Kilda through Mr. J. T. Mackenzie, of Dunvegan, Skye, one of which he has most courteously given to me, and has permitted me to examine the rest: I am also indebted to Mr. Mackenzie himself for one specimen. These birds I have carefully compared with my series of *Troglodytes parvulus*, and am now able to say that I do not consider the St. Kilda bird worthy of specific rank.

Compared only with specimens obtained in England and Scotland, the St. Kilda Wren is rather more distinctly barred on the back, and has the throat and breast whiter and less marked; but I have now before me a specimen from Margaard, Denmark, which has the back distinctly barred; as also one from Piedmont, which is, if anything, more distinctly barred, and has the throat and breast dull white, without any traces of spots. One, again, obtained near Constantinople, on the Asia Minor side of the Bosphorus, is